University of Alberta

Four Piano Recitals and an Essay: "The Muse and the Fashion: A Comparative Study of Goethe Settings by Medtner and Schubert"

by

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ABSTRACT

Russian-born Nikolai Medtner has been one of the forgotten figures of twentieth-century music, until the last couple of decades when his piano music started gaining popularity. It is, however, a little known fact that he composed more than one hundred art songs, in both Russian and German. His family background and education influenced him to develop a strong connection with late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Germany. The genre of the lied is strongly associated with this era and Medtner's composition of songs clearly communicates his desire to return to the aesthetic ideals associated with it. Medtner devoted three entire opuses to the poetry of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In these lieder it is clear how Medtner strives to regain the aesthetic principles of the early nineteenth century, thus living up to his strong belief in the beauty and divine inspiration of music.

Four of Medtner's Goethe settings are analysed side-by-side with Schubert settings of the same text: *Wanderers Nachtlied I* and *II, Nähe des Geliebten* and *Meeresstille*. From these analyses it becomes clear to what extent Medtner followed the principles of the early nineteenth-century lied—like Schubert—focussing on beauty and balance, while fully expressing the text. Medtner uses Goethe texts as a dream of the past, respecting the poetry as important works of art.

As a twentieth-century Russian composer Medtner's songs display the virtuosity and personal expression of the age he lived in, showing similarities with his contemporary and friend, Sergei Rachmaninoff. This is reflected in the greater emphasis on the piano in the general texture of the lied, a characteristic which is also in line with the development of the lied through the course of the nineteenth century. Medtner's lieder

demonstrate his intricate use of rhythm, contrapuntal lines and his use of very limited material, while the larger scale of these works places them in the context of twentieth-century performance practice.

Medtner's lieder, though clearly products of the twentieth century, are focussed on nineteenth-century ideals of beauty and balance, and reflect his search for the Romantic worldview of the past.

Fashion is a synonym for inertness. People await what fashion will pronounce, and then repeat it.

Nikolai Medtner: *The Muse and the Fashion*

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INTRODUCTION

Nikolai Medtner was one of the most influential and respected composers in early twentieth-century Russia. Medtner studied at the Moscow Conservatory at the same time as Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, and his talent was acknowledged both as student and later as professor. In spite of the success he had in his home country, Medtner has been one of the forgotten figures of twentieth-century music, until the last twenty years when a small revival of his music began.

A fine pianist in his own right, Medtner composed only in genres where the piano was involved, and the main bulk of his work consists of solo piano works, such as character pieces and sonatas. Medtner also composed one hundred and eight art songs, and his German lieder will be the focus of this essay.

Though living in the twentieth century, Medtner felt strongly that the aesthetics of the nineteenth century needed to be respected and preserved. His use of Goethe as the source for the majority of his German lieder further emphasises his search for the past. In this light his composition of German lieder indicates an attempt to revive a musical language and genre that had reached its zenith late in the nineteenth century.

In researching the Goethe settings of Nikolai Medtner I want to establish how they fit into the genre of the lied, yet remain an expression of his experience of the twentieth century. Schubert's lieder will be used as historical background and as a highlight of the genre of the German lied, thus allowing a comparison of early twentieth-century conservatism with the means of expression Schubert had used in the early nineteenth century.

Medtner's general musical style, his approach to poetry and his connection particularly with Goethe, the role of the piano and voice in his songs, and his general conception of the lied will be analysed. The development of the lied, from an expression of the *Volksseele* (folk soul) into a highly artistic genre, will be traced and the impact of changed aesthetics, culture, psychological experience and expression of the twentieth century will be included in the discussion.

CHAPTER 1: THE COMPOSER

Biography

Nikolai Medtner was born in Moscow on January 5, 1880. His father was a cultured and scholarly man who owned a lace factory. His mother, who was of German ancestry, was a singer. The atmosphere at home was one of intellectual stimulation and philosophical activity—a combination that inspired the children to follow artistic careers.

Nikolai studied piano with his mother from the age of six, and three years later started studying with his uncle, Fyodor Goedicke (Martyn 1995, 3). When he was twelve, he quit his studies at a *gymnasium* (high school) and demanded to be enrolled as a student at the Moscow Conservatory. From the start, his favourite composers were Scarlatti, Mozart, Bach and Beethoven, although he also admired Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Chopin and Liszt. At the conservatory Nikolai Medtner studied piano under Vasily Ilyich Safonov, counterpoint with Sergei Ivanovich Taneiev and piano with Paul Pabst (6). This is approximately the same time that Rachmaninoff and Scriabin studied at the Conservatory. Upon graduation Medtner received the gold medal and considered a career as a concert pianist, but decided against a performing career in favour of life as a composer.

Medtner started teaching piano at the Moscow Conservatory in 1909, and he also took up editorial work at the Russian Musical Press. This combined with his performing engagements as well as composition made this a very busy time for him. At the end of the school year, Medtner decided not to renew his contract at the conservatory. After moving out of the centre of Moscow, he focussed his attention on composition and performance.

With the outbreak of the First World War, Medtner was "cold-shouldered as a German by extraction" (Martyn 1995, 108) and this had a strong impact on him and his ability to compose. In 1915 Medtner resumed his teaching at the Moscow Conservatory in an attempt to emphasise his Russian citizenship, and as an attempt to avoid being drafted for military service. After the outbreak of the Revolution in 1917, circumstances deteriorated in Moscow, and in the summer of 1919 Medtner went on a year sabbatical, fled the city and retreated to the country. In 1921 he and his wife Anna left Russia (four years after Rachmaninoff) and spent two years in Germany. For the next ten years, they lived in France, finally settling in England in 1935. Medtner continued to make a living mainly from performing, teaching and composing. With the assistance of his friend Rachmaninoff he was able to secure concert tours to America in 1924 to 1925 and again in 1929 to 1930 (Martyn 1995, 166, 199). In England he participated in radio broadcasts and performed frequent concerts, but in 1943 he developed heart problems, which limited his performing career.

Medtner's life changed in 1946 when His Highness the Maharajah of Mysore in India "discovered" his music and sponsored him for one year of recording his own compositions. His health, however, continued to deteriorate, and he died on November 13, 1951.

His friends and contemporaries respected and loved him and in his funeral oration in 1951 Issay Dobroven (Russian pianist, composer and conductor) said:

> But my contemporaries and I have had the happiness of knowing and loving one who took for us the place of conscience – one whose heart was pure as a child's. . . .You are no longer with us, but so long as, at least, one of those who knew you is still living, you will remain our guiding light and our musical conscience. (Orga and Demidenko 1992, 2)

The Man and his Music

Medtner was not only a very religious man, but also one who deeply believed in the purity and directness of music. He laboured over his music for extensive periods and was inclined to severe self-doubt and criticism. He lived for his music, but was not adept at self-promotion; he was not competitive and played only when invited. As an interpreter he was especially famous for his performances of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto (Martyn 1995, 88) and the *Appassionata* (7).

Medtner was appalled by the direction that music took in the twentieth century. He expressed his musical philosophies in a book called *The Muse and the Fashion*, published with the help of Rachmaninoff in 1935. The first part of the book explores the nature of music and its elements, as well as the problems of modernism. The second part is a collection of thoughts on wide-ranging topics of aesthetics in general and on music specifically.

In the early twentieth century Nikolai Medtner was considered one of the most important composers in Russia, together with Rachmaninoff and Scriabin. He was not only very influential, but almost a cult figure. Important artists like Serge Koussevitsky, Alexander Glazunov, Sergei Prokofiev and Artúr Nikisch respected him, but after his move to the West (France and England), with the exception of a select group of people (including Kaikhosru Sorabji, Gerald Abraham, Eric Blom and Ernest Newman) he was unknown and lived in poverty.

Medtner's style remained very constant throughout the course of his life. Taneiev described him as being "born with sonata form" (Martyn 1995, 26) and one of the most striking characteristics of his music is the extensive manipulation of motifs. His distaste

for modernism and resistance against trends set by contemporaries like Stravinsky and Prokofiev imply a very conservative style. To some extent this is exactly the case. Medtner used harmonies more fitting for the nineteenth century and his music often had a strong vein of lyricism. His polyphonic skill and development of short motifs are similar to Beethoven's. This complex contrapuntal writing makes his music challenging to play.

Medtner is often described as the "Russian Brahms," a title he strongly disliked (Martyn 1995, *xi*). His musical characteristics, such as the deep seriousness of the music, his harmonic tendencies, intricate cross-rhythms and the thick texture of piano writing, do show similarities with Brahms' style, yet Medtner never expressed a specific admiration for Brahms. As a result, these characteristics have to be explained as a natural development from the late Romantic musical tradition, where the new capabilities of the piano were exploited. Medtner focussed on self-expression and was thus more interested in finding his own musical language than imitating that of other composers.

In spite of this conservatism, Medtner was also an innovator, especially in form and rhythm. He made use of complex cross-rhythms, unusual meters and syncopation. Medtner's use of rhythm was greatly admired by Rachmaninoff (Alexeev 1994, 4). As a composer with German roots, he composed in a Germanic tradition, characterised by a more intense and serious mode of expression than the lighter approach that dominated French music over the centuries.

Like Chopin's oeuvre, all Medtner's works are based on the piano. He did not compose any orchestral music apart from piano concertos and during that composition process he struggled very much with the instrumentation. Medtner's most important

works are eleven collections of *Märchen*, fourteen piano sonatas, three piano concertos and several collections of *Mood Pictures* and *Forgotten Melodies*.

Even though he mostly composed in large forms, his miniatures had the same large-scale tension as his longer works. This intense expression is due to his use of dense counterpoint, thick writing and rhythmical complexity, which is present even in the smaller forms. Apart from the voice, the only other important instrument that featured in Medtner's compositions was the violin. He composed three violin sonatas and two sets of short violin pieces for his brother, Alexander, who was a violinist and conductor[1] (Martyn 1995, 187).

Medtner frequently used literary connections in his music. *Mood Pictures*, *Fairy Tales* and *Forgotten Melodies* make up the bulk of his character pieces, but many other works also bear subtitles, like *Sonata-Reminiscenza, Sonata minnacciosa, Sonata-Idyll, Sonata tragica* and many others. This tendency is also evident in his Third Piano Concerto, subtitled "Ballade," which was inspired by a literary work of Lermontov. This love of literature, combined with the fact that his mother and his wife Anna were singers, led to the composition of 108 published songs (Tozer 2004, 4).

Medtner's music is not always easy to follow and appreciate in one hearing. According to Ernest Newman (Orga and Demidenko 1992, 3) this is "not because of any extravagance of thought or confusion of technique, it is simply because this music does go on thinking from bar to bar, evolving logically from its premises."

---

[1] Alexander conducted the Russian premiere of Medtner's Second Piano Concerto.

Literary Connections in Medtner's Music, Culminating in his Goethe Settings

Coming from a family with strong German connections, Medtner was exposed to a wide variety of multinational influences in highly cultured and intellectual surroundings. His maternal great-grandparents were actors and his great-grandfather, Friedrich Gebhard, met and corresponded with the German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Martyn 1995, 1). Their children inherited the love of art, and Nikolai's grandmother became a famous singer in Moscow. She married Karl Andreyevich Goedicke, who came from a musical family as well. With the marriage of Alexandra Goedicke and Karl Medtner, two families with strong artistic interests and talents were united. On the Medtner side, there was the interest in literature, philosophy and theatre, while on the Goedicke, side the love of music. These characteristics were inherited by the five children, Karl, Alexander, Emil, Sofiya and Nikolai. In this environment Nikolai experienced a variety of elements that strongly influenced his musical taste and love of literature in general (Martyn 1995, 3).

He made use of descriptive titles and references to poetry throughout his piano oeuvre, emphasised by his first published work, *The Angel* (1896–1897). In this piano piece, Medtner quoted the first couple of lines from Lermontov's poem of the same title. This text was not only relevant for this piece, but became a credo throughout his musical career.

The Angel – Mikhail Lermontov[2]

At midnight an angel was crossing the sky,
And quietly he sang;
The moon and the stars and the concourse of clouds
Paid heed to his heavenly song.

He sang of the bliss of the innocent souls
In heavenly gardens above;
Of almighty God he sang out, and his praise
Was pure and sincere.

He bore in his arms a young soul
To our valley of sorrow and tears;
The young soul remembered the heavenly song
So vivid and yet without words.

And long did it struggle on earth,
With wondrous desire imbued;
But none of the tedious songs of our earth
Could rival the celestial song.

According to Martyn (1995, 17), seven years after the composition of this piano piece, Medtner discovered that his music fit perfectly to the entire text of Lermontov's

[2] Barrie Martyn (1995, 17)

poem. It is said that Medtner was astounded by this discovery, and he decided to give the melodic line to the voice, thus creating a song without significantly altering his existing piano piece. Medtner's Op. 1 is a good example of his extreme lyricism, and it is striking that a piece that was not intended for the voice could match the text of the poem so well. The song setting exemplifies Medtner's natural understanding of poetry and the word-music relationship.

The Angel is furthermore important for the meaning that it had for Medtner on a personal, musical and religious level. Medtner used the text in the preface to his book, *The Muse and the Fashion*, in which he expresses his musical opinions and the religious connection between composition and faith in God. At the core of the poem for him was the strong belief that God created all music and that composers merely recreate the "holy song."

Medtner's affinity for literature combined with his instinctive lyrical approach to music was very suitable for the composition of songs. In 1903 Medtner described in a letter to his brother Emil how he studied poetry and explained his understanding of the important poetic elements that make certain poets more suitable for musical settings. In this letter he also specifically refers to his love for Goethe:

> And now, when I opened Goethe, I went off my head with delight. No truly, take Tyutchev or Fet, for example; although they too are talented, you nevertheless to a certain degree feel that poetic form is a burden to them. There is no originality in their form, only in their ideas and moods. And when you think about it and look into it properly, it turns out that maybe Russians in general have rather little originality in artistic form. . . . "He used form in his writing"! How absurd that phrase would sound if applied to Beethoven or Wagner, who themselves were the complete embodiment of form and whose every step is a model. (Martyn 1995, 21)

In 1909 Medtner said "This is just why I especially love Pushkin and Goethe, because, with all their greatness and spirituality, they always vindicate life" (Martyn 1995, 67).

In 1909 Medtner wrote program notes for a *Liederabend* (evening of song) in which he describes his close relationship with Goethe. Goethe's approach to the beauty and spirituality of nature appealed to Medtner, who believed that earthly life is a version of heavenly life, and that one has to consciously search for the heavenly on earth (Flamm 1995, 164). The folk-like tone in some of Goethe's poetry appealed to Medtner, who had an affinity for folk tone in song and dance. He furthermore felt that Goethe's poetry lent itself very well to musical setting. According to Podol'ner (Flamm 1995, 166) it is especially in his early Goethe settings that Medtner follows in the early romantic tradition of simplicity and folk-like character, thus resembling Beethoven's songs.

For Medtner it was clearly a combination of content and structure that drew him to poetry. Considering Taneiev's comment about his student's mastery of form (Medtner was "born with sonata form" [Martyn 1995, 26]), it is not surprising that poetic form was of major importance to him. Medtner found in Goethe's poetry the perfect balance of these requirements and proceeded to compose thirty-one settings on texts by Goethe.

Medtner's first Goethe setting (1903) was published in a group of three songs forming Op. 3. At this stage Medtner made use of Fet's translation of the poem *Auf dem See* (On the Lake). In spite of the text being in Russian, the character of the music differs greatly from the Lermontov and Pushkin songs in the same set (Martyn 1995, 22). In the Russian songs Medtner makes use of a thicker texture and intense drama. The Goethe

setting in comparison has a more direct appeal and simplicity, which was to characterise many of Medtner's later settings of this poet's work.

From 1904 to about 1908 Medtner used almost exclusively German texts for his songs, creating a "German period" in his vocal compositions. During this time he focussed mainly on Goethe, with three entire opuses on Goethe texts (Op. 6, 15 and 18) totalling twenty-seven settings, while composing only a very limited number of Russian songs.

Around 1908 to1909 Medtner went into what can be called his Russian phase. Medtner did use texts of Tyutchev and Fet, but clearly favoured Pushkin, composing three consecutive collections exclusively on his texts (Op. 29, 32 and 36). It was only in 1922 that Medtner returned to German texts, using a text by Goethe as the motto for his Sonata-Vocalise. After this he combined Russian and German poets in the same collections, but with fewer Goethe settings and in general fewer songs than in the two previous periods.

As already mentioned, Medtner did not limit his use of Goethe texts to his song settings. In 1906 Medtner composed three one-movement sonatas, collected in the Op. 11 Sonaten-Triade. These three works were originally preceded with a quote from Goethe's *Trilogie der Leidenschaft*, to which it shows similarity in structure and some content.[3] Again in 1907, Medtner used an epigraph from Goethe's *Nachtgesang* for his Three Nocturnes for Violin and Piano (Op. 16). In this case the content of the poem is strongly reflected in the music. This indicates the degree of inspiration Medtner found in Goethe's poetry. With his return in 1922 to Goethe's work, Medtner used *Geweihter Platz (Sacred*

[3] Medtner dedicated the work to Andrey Bratenshi, his future wife's brother, after his suicide. The *Trilogy of Passion* deals with the loss of a loved one (Martyn 1995, 42).

Ground) as the motto in his Sonata-Vocalise, Op. 41, No. 1. He set these words to music, followed by the vocalised sonata. This work by Goethe shows great similarity with the text for Medtner's first published work, *The Angel*, by Lermontov. Both touch on the subject of artistic creation, inspiration and the importance of a "higher hand" in the creative process. Goethe's text reads:

Sacred Ground

When the Graces, down from Olympus,
secretly join the rows of Nymphs
gathering on the hallowed night of the moon,
the poet listens to them
and hears their beautiful songs
and observes the mysterious movement of their secret dances.
Whatever glory heaven possesses,
whatever loveliness the earth has happily created stands,
revealed to the dreamer as he awakes.
He tells everything to the Muses,
and so that the gods do not become angry,
the Muses at once teach him to tell secrets modestly. (Martyn 1995, 42)

Medtner only used poetry of the highest quality, yet it is striking that many of the poets he preferred were not fashionable choices at that time. When Medtner used Lermontov's *Angel* in his first published work (1903), Lermontov's work was rarely used, and if so, mostly due to convention. By 1900, the general literary taste had moved away from romantic and realistic poetry toward symbolism (Flamm 1995, 147). Already early in his life Medtner lived by his "motto," moving away from the fashion, attempting

to preserve traditional musical and aesthetic values. This attempt to revive the old contributed to the choice of texts for his songs. In *The Muse and the Fashion* he further explains his poetic taste:

> Is it possible that the symbolists of the turn of the century could be more symbolical than Pushkin or Goethe? True symbolism is not a QUALITY of thought, but the DEGREE of the spiritual penetration of that thought. (Medtner 1935, 129)

Around the turn of the century, there was a general dislike in Russia for the dominance of German musical aesthetics. This was to a great extent due to the influence of the "Mighty Five" (Cui, Balakireff, Borodin, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov), who encouraged Russian nationalists against the sentimentalism and pedantry of German music (Sabaneyeff 1967, 129). This anti-Germanic atmosphere was largely the reaction of a country that, for a long time, produced music mainly under the influence of other national styles. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Russia moved first from a dominance of Italian music, to that of German music. This was followed by the development of a Russian nationalist movement, which became less dominant towards the turn of the century, with a greater emphasis again on the German musical tradition (132).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, two new conservatories were founded in Russia, within five years of each other. The Rubinstein brothers founded the St. Petersburg and Moscow conservatories, but these two institutions had very different characteristics. At the St. Petersburg Conservatory nationalistic tendencies dominated, while in Moscow, music developed under the influence of Tchaikovsky, who himself utilised a very western musical language (Sabaneyeff 1967, 21). It was in the

conservative musical surroundings of the Moscow Conservatory, where the classic western European art was dominant, that Medtner received his education.

It was here that Medtner studied under Taneiev, who had also been educated in this conservative setting. Taneiev was a supporter of western aesthetic principles and loved older composers like Palestrina, Bach and Mozart. He had a great love for the lied and his mastery of this genre must have had an influence on his students (Sabaneyeff 1967, 34). Medtner was influenced by Taneiev's view that music should be pure and holy, and by his great emphasis on musical conscience. Given this background, it is not surprising that Medtner did not approve of the contemporary musical developments that started dominating the western world and took hold in Russia in the 1920s.

In spite of this strong emphasis on western and especially German music, Medtner still was influenced by his Russian surroundings. Russian characteristics like the contrapuntal use of short motifs to create unity, ostinato patterns, and the general dark colour of the music show up in Medtner's music. He uses these elements without creating a distinctive Russian sound, but rather achieving an integrated musical language expressing his aesthetic ideals, yet acknowledging his Russian heritage. Medtner's music in general and songs in particular, show many similarities to that of Rachmaninoff. It is important to note though, that Rachmaninoff often consciously attempted to express his Russianness, while Medtner expressed his ideals of nineteenth-century German music, as a twentieth-century Russian composer.

Nikolai Medtner's family background and his education at the Moscow Conservatory greatly influenced his affinity for and composition of German lieder. There are few genres that are so strongly German and associated with the nineteenth century as

this one. Medtner's Goethe settings can be clearly classified as German lieder yet show subtle signs of Russian influence. This clearly shows his affinity for the western styles of the nineteenth century, rather than the nationalistic tendencies of his own country or the developments of the twentieth century. As a result, despite their relatively small place in his entire compositional output, they reflect important elements of his background and character.

Characteristic of Medtner's song settings is the great attention he gives to the poetry as an artistic form and his respect for the structure and intention of the literary work. In most cases he gives careful attention to the accents of individual words, as well as to the rhythm of the spoken text, which he then translates into musical language. Only on rare occasions does he add material to the poetry, and then only by repeating specific lines or words for emphasis. In this sense his approach is similar to that of Wolf. This is partly due to a changed approach to the works of the great poets of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including Goethe, which now were recognised as important works of art.

The importance of the text cannot be underestimated, yet Medtner also very clearly expressed his view on the balance between word and music. In *The Muse and the Fashion* he discussed the balance between musical independence and poetic inspiration:

> Poetic text may beget a purely musical song which flows along, sometimes uniting itself with the text, but never forsaking its own musical bed. Or the same text may not beget any song, melody, or any musical form whatsoever; it may merely serve as a canvas for musical declamation or as an illustration of separate and mostly external points such as the trills of a nightingale, the rustle of the water, or the howling of the wind. The music of such songs, that is entirely guided by the text and has no self-sufficient musical sense or contents, naturally belongs to the domain of program music, since in writing it the musician, like a school boy, was merely taking down dictation of the poetic text. (Medtner 1935, 125)

Medtner described program music as "only music in which the form itself and contents are dictated and justified by a certain program or subject matter" (Medtner 1935, 124). In this statement he does not criticise program music or songs, but music devoid of sincere artistic expression in favour of extravagant display. This is an important point when considering Medtner's music (and songs more particularly). The focus of his compositions was that of divine inspiration reflected in honest beauty, rather than virtuosic display or text painting for its own sake.

From this we furthermore must understand that, though Medtner was very selective in his choice of poetry, he still did not consider the poetry as more important than the music. This fits in with his strong musical integrity—not allowing the poetry to deprive the music of its own intrinsic value and "heavenly inspiration." By not sacrificing the quality of either the music or the poetry, making neither subservient to the other, Medtner produced masterful lieder of high complexity and beauty.

The German lied

In order to understand Nikolai Medtner's Goethe settings and determine how they fit into the genre of the lied, it is important to look into the development of the lied in the nineteenth century. The German lied is one of the most intimate art forms of the nineteenth century and can be described as a symbiosis of word and music (Seelig 1996, 1). Towards the end of the eighteenth century there was an emphasis on the written language in Germany, which culminated in the work of the great writer and poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the *Volkslied* came to be viewed as an expression of the *Volksseele (folk soul)*. This can be described as the soul and identity of the German nation as captured in folk poetry, folk song and music, as well as national myths and history. The songs were mostly focussed on ideas of love, nature, home and death. The written word gained importance through poetry, folk poetry and stories and gained further popularity and importance in the form of periodicals, biographies, diaries and, in musical life, through the appearance of concert programs. As the eighteenth century progressed, the rise of the prosperous middle class created a social climate in which instruments and printed music became more common. This fuelled the rise of the *Volkslied* and inspired composers to try their hand at imitating this genre, intended as *Hausmusik* (music aimed at amateur performances in the home) (Stein 1971, 32).

Often these folk poems themselves were called "lieder," like Heinrich Heine's *Buch der Lieder* (Whitton 1984, 3). Johann Gottfried von Herder, a famous poet, theologian, philosopher and collector of folk songs, coined the term *Volkslied*. He referred to the idea that poetry is incomplete without music by saying: "Melodie ist die

Seele des Liedes . . . Lied muß gehört, nicht gesehen werden" (Melody is the soul of song . . . songs must be heard, not seen) (Seelig 1996, 3).

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poems are filled with sensuality, passion, emotion, and dramatic lyricism—often based on his own life experiences. He said of his works: "there is in them nothing which has not been lived, felt, enjoyed, suffered, as part of experience" (Schumann 1979, 10).

Goethe found inspiration in folk poetry and emulated the folksong style; he wrote poems based on nature as well as narrative ballads, following the direct approach of folk poetry. Apart from the content, he also often followed the German folksong format of four lines per stanza, each line containing three to four beats. In addition he used rhyme patterns that were similar to those of folk poetry. These characteristics gave his poems the *Volkston* (song in the manner of the people) quality.

Goethe indicated approval of his poetry being set to music in statements like "immer singen," but for him the music was of lesser importance than the poetry (Seelig 1996, 3). Because of this it was the songs of Zelter and Reichardt that gained his approval, and eight of Reichardt's settings of poems from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* were included in the published work (Stein 1971, 35). The *Volkslied* character of Goethe's poetry influenced his preference for simple, strophic settings of his poems, while he strongly disliked the "modern through-composed songs" (Smeed 1987, 93). This fit the general taste of the time, since almost all the song anthologies of the early nineteenth century contained settings of Reichardt and Zelter, who both preferred strophic form for their settings of lied texts.

Schubert is often described as the "father" of the lied. Although he clearly built on the work of his predecessors, as an individual Schubert had the single greatest impact on the course the lied was to take in the nineteenth century. With his setting of *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (from *Faust*) in 1814—his first Goethe setting—Schubert set the scene for the new direction the lied was to take. Youens (1996, 49) describes Goethe as a catalyst for Schubert's sudden eruption into song in 1815. In *Gretchen* Schubert allows the vocal line to follow the text in every nuance, while using an independent piano texture, which not only intensifies the expression of Gretchen's emotional and psychological experience, but also displays onomatopoeic characteristics. By using a rondo-like structure, Schubert moves away from the traditional strophic form, towards new means of expression. It is also important to note that by making changes to the poetry to fit his reading of the poem and his musical ideas, he asserted the power and importance of music in the lied. Here the music and the word are treated as equal partners, and the setting serves to enhance the expressive power of the poem. With this composition Schubert took the lied away from its *Volkslied* (folk song) character, towards the new genre of the *Kunstlied* (art song). Schubert went on to compose more that seventy songs on Goethe texts.

In order to demonstrate Medtner's approach to the lied, considering both its debt to tradition and how it developed beyond it, four of his Goethe settings will be analysed side-by-side with Schubert's settings of the same texts. Although these are early settings of Schubert, dating from 1815 when many of his masterpieces were composed, this was still a time of experimentation for him. It also has to be acknowledged that these four Medtner settings were from early in his career (1904–1908). However, Medtner's compositional style did not show significant change through the course of his life. Both

Schubert and Medtner had at the heart of their settings the intent of fully expressing the text, but the means through which they accomplished that differ greatly.

CHAPTER 2: SONG ANALYSES

Wanderers Nachtlied II	***Wayfarer's Nightsong II***
[1] Über allen Gipfeln	Over every summit
[2] Ist Ruh,	is peace,
[3] In allen Wipfeln	in every tree-top
[4] Spürest du	you feel
[5] Kaum einen Hauch;	scarce a breath;
[6] Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.	The birds in the wood are hushed.
[7] Warte nur, balde	Only wait, soon
[8] Ruhest du auch.	You too will be at peace.[4]

This short, unassuming poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is packed with imagery and subtle nuance that spoke to composers of the nineteenth century. Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt and Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel, among others, were drawn to the text and set it to music.

Before the music can be analysed, it is necessary to briefly look into the poetry and its meaning. *Wanderers Nachtlied II* is very brief, consisting of eight short lines. The imagery used is that of nature: the mountains, trees, birds and wind. The focus moves from the distant and high mountaintops, towards images that are lower, closer and smaller, finally ending on the individual human being. A downward movement occurs, moving from the heavenly to the earthly. Peace and quiet is reflected in the poem, yet this does not necessarily reflect the emotion of the poet. Though the description is of nature, where there is peace (scarcely a breeze and quiet birds), the poet parallels that with his own inner experience and describes how he too will be silent soon. This could be

[4] Translation from German to English by Emily Ezust, http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/

interpreted in various ways, with a possible inference that death is a peaceful rescue from life. Since the movement is downward it could imply that it ends in the grave, underneath the surface of the beautiful nature.

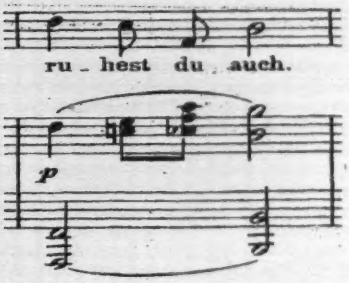
Schubert's setting dates from 1823 and follows the simplicity of the poem. The tempo indication is *Langsam* and he makes use of a simple 4/4 meter. The song is in B-flat major and the choice of a major key supports the positive outcome of the text.

Vocally the song spans only one octave. The vocal line of the first five poetic lines is very static, using very little of that narrow range. Schubert draws attention to the last part of the poem by increasing the vocal range and by moving up to the highest notes (on "balde") in the song. To set the sixth line, he also makes use of syncopation in both the vocal and piano parts. In the last two measures the original material returns in the piano, emphasising the simplicity and power of nature.

The piano part moves mostly in double thirds and sixths; once again Schubert makes use of simple means to express the poem. Towards the end of the song he makes use of horn call imitations in the piano part, thus using tone painting. The horn call has for centuries been associated with nature as well as distance and uncertainty. By using it here, Schubert implies the return to nature (or the earth) after death, but also general uncertainty about death itself.

Schubert uses several additional techniques to emphasise the last two lines of the poem. The voice not only reaches the highest notes of the song ("F") twice, but both times that pitch is preceded by a turn. A fermata extends the note, adding additional power. By emphasising the word "balde" (soon), Schubert creates a sense of urgency and expectation. At this point it is not clear whether it is something that is longed for or

something inevitable. According to Georgiades (1986, 99) the final cadence (I [6/4] – V – I) carries the weight of cadential completion, and combined with the poetic statement, there is a sense of fulfillment. This is especially the case with the second occurrence in measure 13, where the voice and piano together follow this static rhythm.

Example 1. Schubert, *Wanderers Nachtlied II*, measure 13

Rhythm plays an important role in the shaping of the song. Schubert makes extensive use of rhythm to express the poetic structure and express the meaning of the text. Georgiades (1986, 89-94) discusses Schubert's rhythmic approach in detail. The first three lines of the poem are clearly separated in the piano part through the use of different rhythmic material for each, yet the continuity remains in the gesture and expression in the vocal line. Georgiades also discusses the unity and continuity created through Schubert's use of the opening rhythm, with its hymn-like character, at the beginning and the end, thus enclosing the song. Other rhythmic patterns, like the dotted eighth-sixteenth, play an important role in creating unity, but also in emphasising structural and interpretative key points in the music.

The dynamic range throughout the song is generally low. There are *crescendo* indications and hairpin dynamics throughout, but the dynamic level never rises above

piano. This hushed atmosphere creates an introspective and peaceful quality very fitting for the poem.

In Goethe's poem there is no repetition. Schubert however decided to repeat several lines, thus extending the song. The entire song is only fourteen measures long, and without the repeated lines it would have been eleven in total. Schubert repeats the word "schweigen." This intensifies the feeling of silence and although it has specifically to do with the birds, it could be interpreted as the individual's loneliness and isolation. In the last two lines Schubert repeats the words "warte nur" and this gives the line an almost menacing quality—there is no escape from death. In the repetition of these lines, Schubert changes the placement within the measure, and the second time the word "ruhest" falls on the downbeat. This change emphasises peace and rest rather than a time element ("warte" or "balde").

Schubert makes use of very basic harmonies throughout the song. This adds simplicity to the work. The authentic cadence at the end of the song is particularly effective and final. This is due to the fact that Schubert repeats the dominant-tonic movement in the bass three times. After the voice already appears to have finished the song, Schubert repeats the cadence in the piano again. Due to this strong authentic cadence, it suggests that Schubert interpreted death as the end, even though it is not a negative experience.

In 1904, Medtner composed a set of nine songs on texts by Goethe. In this set he placed the *Wanderers Nachtlied II* as the opening song, giving it a prominent position in his oeuvre. It was published as Op. 6 in 1906, only his second opus of songs, and the first set devoted exclusively to German texts. It is significant that he chose to make exclusive

use of Goethe texts for his first large set of German lieder. This is in line with Medtner's great admiration for Goethe as well as his general attempt to revive old traditions and values.

As can be expected, Medtner's approach to the *Wanderers Nachtlied II* is very different from Schubert's. Similar to Schubert, Medtner indicates a slow tempo marked *Lento* and a metronome marking of 40 to the dotted quarter. Medtner set the poem in 9/8 meter, in E-flat major. The total length of the song is 24 bars.

Medtner's use of limited material is reflected in this song. The accompaniment is based on three motifs that form the entire material of the song. The first motif is an ascending line of three notes, starting in unison and ending in a chord.

Example 2. Medtner, *Wanderers Nachtlied II*, measure 1

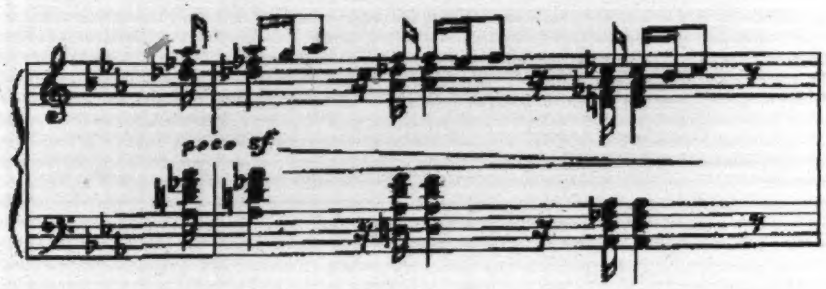
This motif generally outlines a primary chord, establishing a clear tonal centre. Because of the rhythm of the motif (sixteenth-note triplet, the first of which is a rest), it has an ornamental, fluttering quality, imitating the wind in the leaves. Medtner specifically indicated that the short notes should be played shorter than written, which adds both colour and a sense of movement. The atmosphere it creates is very important—a gentle, fluid character that perfectly anticipates the poem.

The second motif has a strong tonal quality, often moving from dominant to tonic. It consists of the simple movement of a sixteenth-note chord moving to an eighth-note chord, creating a "short-long" effect.

Example 3. Medtner, *Wanderers Nachtlied II*, measures 2–3

In general this is used in a lower register, adding a solid foundation to the song. The solidity of the authentic cadence gives the listener a feeling of security and certainty, further emphasised by the longer note value on the tonic chord, adding to the feeling of rest.

The third motif, though rhythmically and melodically straightforward, carries much of the tonal complexity and ambiguity in the song. It consists of a chord, where the upper note moves to the lower auxiliary and returns.

Example 4. Medtner, *Wanderers Nachtlied II*, measures 3–4

Similar to the first motif, this is basically a musical ornament. Following three measures of stable tonic harmony, this motif, with its unexpected harmonies appears, carrying to a great extent the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty that one reads in the poem. The bass line moves from A-flat to D-natural and down to A-flat again, focussing on the sub-dominant and leading tone. This implies cadential movement, while the tritone

further adds to the harmonic tension. In addition, there is a combination of D-flat and D-natural in the first two chords, but the D-flat falls away in the last chord, making the chord more stable.

This motif is varied through the course of the song, with differing levels of dissonance. The way the third motif finally moves into the first motif, with its clear tonal character, creates a return to peace and resignation. Right before the climax of the song, the third motif is repeated three times, building in intensity, before it resolves into a *fortissimo* chord.

The vocal line is frequently interrupted, seldom stretching over more than two or three measures before the piano plays an entire bar alone. This clearly gives great importance to the piano, which is heard alone for ten of the twenty-four measures. In general the vocal line is very static, moving in even note values and small intervals. The individual phrases move in a very narrow range, often with repeated notes. The voice moves in slow note values, with the only complexity created by the alteration of eighth notes in triplets and duplets.

One of the most interesting aspects of the vocal line is that each appearance of a melodic fragment starts higher than the previous: the first starts on B-flat, the second on E-flat, the third on G and the fourth and fifth on B-flat again. This outlines the tonic chord of E-flat major, emphasised by the final note in the voice, a high E-flat, which is not only the tonic, but also the highest note in the entire song (it appears only in measures 16 and 17 in the voice). The effect of this is twofold. In the first place, by starting each phrase to outline an E-flat major chord, Medtner increases the feeling of order and peace by emphasising the clear tonal framework despite the harmonic complexity that occurs in

the third motif of the accompaniment. Secondly, by using a rising line for the onset of each phrase, Medtner counteracts the descending movement in the poem. In his interpretation, in spite of the descent to the earth, there is in reality an ascending move towards heaven.

Medtner makes use of very specific and detailed dynamic indications throughout the song. Like Schubert's setting, most of Medtner's *Wanderers Nachtlied II* is set at a low dynamic level, ranging from *ppp* to *pp* for the first twelve measures. Nonetheless, there are many hairpins and several *poco sf* indications. There is one dramatic departure from the prevailing quiet tone: in measure 13 an intense *crescendo* starts, ending three bars later with triple *forte* in the *maestoso* section. This section is the setting for the last two lines of the poem, "warte nur, balde ruhest du auch." After the voice finishes, the dynamic level falls back down to *ppp* at the end.

Medtner prepares the climax with a slowly ascending line in the vocal part, where each phrase starts higher than the previous one. In addition to the high dynamic level, the vocal line has accent marks, emphasising the importance of the text. In this aspect, the two settings of Schubert and Medtner differ greatly. By using a low dynamic level, Schubert gives a sense that death is inevitable, though not to be feared. In contrast, Medtner's setting is more exuberant in its view of death, interpreting it as something exciting and positive. Medtner's religious background further supports this reading.

All the elements combined contribute to the effectiveness of the song as a fusion of music and literature. The three motifs (especially the first and third) add a calming character to the music. The two-measure prelude is based on the E-flat major tonic chord, with the rhythmic fluttering of the grace notes creating a sense of quiet and peace. The

sustained character of the voice entrance (on a repeated B-flat, moving to D-flat) enhances the meaning of the text ("Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh").

Medtner made fewer changes to the text than Schubert. He chose to repeat the second line of the poem, emphasising the central idea—peace in nature and life. This is the only change he makes to Goethe's text. Medtner approached the poems of Goethe as highly important literary works, which stood the test of time and which, now in the twentieth century, were considered great works of art. As a result, Medtner, like Wolf, approached the poem as an artwork in itself and made minimum changes, where Schubert took more liberty with the text.

This furthermore fits in with the general approach to the poetry and song. Early in the nineteenth century Goethe's poetry and the setting thereof were intended to be used by the general population as *Hausmusik*, which by nature implies a greater freedom with respect to the songs and their function. By the time that Medtner composed his songs in the early twentieth century, both the poetry and lied (as a genre) were recognised as important art forms with the focus on professional performance.

The complexity of the chords used at the end of most of the phrases (for example in measures 4, 6, 12 and 16) is increased through the use of chromaticism and intervals other than traditional thirds. By creating harmonic tension and release, Medtner emphasises the ambiguity of the text, drawing attention to the tension between the supposed threat of death and the peace that is associated with it. His use of harmony, though much more complex than that of Schubert, continues to focus on a nineteenth-century model, avoiding atonality in favour of chromaticism.

Medtner's setting is much more complex than that of Schubert. Apart from a two-measure prelude and one-measure postlude, the voice is present throughout Schubert's entire setting; for Medtner, true to his style, the piano plays a much more integral part. Even apart from the prelude, postlude and several interludes, the piano does not function as a mere support for the voice, but presents exclusive thematic material throughout the song. It is also equally involved in creating the atmosphere and depiction of the text as is the voice.

Medtner's setting is in many ways far removed from the early nineteenth-century examples of the German lied, yet he respects the main principles of the tradition. Like Schubert, he respects the text, not only by following the natural nuance of the words and by making only limited changes to suit the music, but he also carefully interprets it. Medtner attempts to reflect the meaning of the poem in the music without the music overwhelming the text. At the same time, Medtner's setting of *Wanderers Nachtlied II* is harmonically and melodically far more complex than that of Schubert, but never to the point of abandoning a nineteenth-century sense of aesthetic in favour of that of the twentieth century. The focus strongly remains on beauty, and Medtner uses dissonance sparingly with the aim of creating an effect through resolution.

In *Wanderers Nachtlied II* Medtner focusses his attention on creating atmosphere through the use of colour in the piano part. There is little direct interpretation of the text through the use of tone-painting, yet the general character of simplicity and the essence of the poetic meaning are reflected in the sparse, transparent writing and use of limited thematic material. In this song Medtner captures a general sense of the poetic intent through the ethereal quality he is able to create, especially in the accompaniment.

The biggest difference between the settings of Schubert and Medtner lies in the balance between voice and piano. In Schubert's setting the voice and piano parts are interwoven, moving mostly as one in rhythm and basic melodic direction. At the same time it is important to note the importance of the piano's presentation of rhythmic material throughout the song, shaping it in terms of both structure and meaning. Medtner separates the piano and voice and uses them totally independently. He develops his setting of *Wanderers Nachtlied II* using motifs and harmonic tension and release in the piano. By doing this, he creates different layers of interest than that of the more integrated song of Schubert. It also adds to the difficulty level for both performers; this is not a work that can be easily performed by amateurs, where the Schubert song was still focussed on the idea of *Hausmusik*. This development does not detract from the quality of the music and the respect to the verse, but rather creates a sensitive balance between word and music, as well as singer and pianist.

Wanderers Nachtlied I	*Wayfarer's Night Song I*
[1] Der du von dem Himmel bist,	You who are from heaven,
[2] Alles Leid und Schmerzen stillest,	you quiet all sorrow and pain;
[3] Den, der doppelt elend ist,	and he who is doubly wretched
[4] Doppelt mit Erquickung füllest,	you fill with twice as much comfort.
[5] Ach! ich bin des Treibens müde!	Ah! I am tired of being driven!
[6] Was soll all der Schmerz und Lust?	For what is all this pain and joy?
[7] Süßer Friede,	Sweet peace,
[8] Komm, ach komm in meine Brust!	Come, ah, come into my heart![5]

Goethe wrote this poem in 1776. It was published in a religious periodical, *Christliches Magazin,* in 1780 and can be interpreted as a prayer for peace (Byrne 2003, 121). The poem consists of one continuous thought that builds in intensity up to the last two lines, where the poet asks for peace to come to him. Alternate lines rhyme, and there is an emphasis throughout the poem on the "-st" sound, with the exception of lines 5 and 7, which end with open vowels. The "-st" is very striking, yet has a calming, peaceful effect on the listener.

In *Wanderers Nachtlied I* the speaker clearly expresses his emotional exhaustion; another translation of line 5 is "oh, I am weary of the struggle," which better conveys the sense of exhaustion. The speaker goes as far as calling himself "doubly wretched" thus emphasising the struggle on earth. There is a constant forward movement in the poem and the growing intensity creates a sense of confused acceleration, culminating in the final two lines where the poet begs for peace. This can be interpreted in a few different

[5] Translation from German to English by Emily Ezust, http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/

ways. The poet asks "Süßer Friede" to "komm in meine Brust" which expresses a desire for peace as part of a physical existence. It can also refer to the heavenly peace after death, away from the earthly distress. The third option is that of suicide. The speaker longs for peace and the only way to achieve it is through death.

Schubert's beautiful setting of this poem dates from July 1815 and is remarkable for its simplicity of means. It consists of a mere twelve bars in G-flat major, written in 4/4 meter. Schubert indicated that the song be performed *Langsam, mit Ausdruck.* Almost one hundred years later, in 1907, Medtner set the poem as part of his Op. 15. It is in F major, is nineteen measures long, and is marked *Largo.*

Apart from a short postlude, the piano plays an exclusively supportive role, without virtuoso passages or great complexity. Schubert makes use of very static and largely consonant harmonies in the first two measures, employing a conventional chord progression with a clear tonal base. This combined with the static vocal lines in the first two measures creates a lack of movement which emphasises the peace and comfort expressed in the first half of the poem. These measures furthermore have a hymn-like or prayer-like rhythm and character, emphasising the spiritual element. These two lines of text are each set to one measure of music, and are treated very similarly. The third and fourth lines show slight differences in treatment, the most striking of which is the leap on the word "doppelt," drawing the attention to that intensifying word. Harmonically the music remains very tonal, with the exception of the dominant of E-flat minor (measure 3) accompanied by a rhythmic change in the piano part, which creates increased rhythmic movement. The dominant occurs on the word "elend," drawing the attention to the true

state of the speaker, while the faster rhythmic tempo creates forward motion, implying the urgent need for resolution and comfort ("doppelt mit Entzückung fullest").[6]

The second half of the poem is treated differently. The vocal phrase starts high in measure 5 and descends through an octave. At this point the rhythmic pace speeds up, especially when the piano enters with sixteenth notes. Schubert's approach of setting each line of the text to its own measure of music now changes, and there is a greater sense of urgency in the vocal line, not only through the faster rhythm, but also through the early vocal entry of the sixth line of the poem on the upbeat of measure 6. Harmonically Schubert makes use of conventional harmonies, using only four dominant sevenths (measures 5, 6, 8 and 10). As a result the emotional intensity is primarily expressed rhythmically, and through the wider vocal and dynamic range.

In measure 8 Schubert returns to the slower rhythmic movement, but includes the marking, *etwas Geschwinder*, increasing the tempo. He repeats the last two lines of the poem, creating a strong sense of resolution by this repetition and the strong cadential progression. This creates a sense of security and safety, which is what the poet longs for. Schubert stretches the word "Süßer" to be the longest note of the vocal line, and "komm" as the highest. This clearly draws attention to this part of the poem. By using simple harmonies and rhythm, Schubert prevents any anxiety and instead creates a peaceful end to the song, closing with a plagal cadence, reminiscent of the "amen" of a hymn.

Schubert makes use of a very interesting melodic line in which the poetry unfolds. In the first four phrases (each representing one line from the poem) the first and fourth start on the tonic and end a third higher, on the mediant. The third phrase begins and ends

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[6] Schubert changed the word "Erquickung" to "Entzückung," changing the literal meaning from "refreshment" to "delight" or "ecstasy."

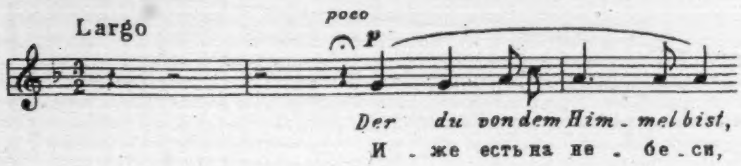
on tonic harmony. This clearly establishes the key of the song. The second phrase is a transposition of the first, so it follows the exact same pattern. The fifth line of the poem is set to a descending line, ranging over an octave. This is the first true descending line of the setting and expresses the fatigue of the poet, further emphasised by the appoggiatura. The last three lines of text once again start on the tonic, mediant and dominant, a return to the triadic outline that creates a very clear tonal centre. Melodically the last four measures also follow a more winding line with balanced ascending and descending movement, encompassing a wider range than the first four measures. The more expressive lyricism in the melodic writing contributes to the sense of peace at the end of the song.

Schubert uses the vocal line to create the rise and fall of emotion according to the text—initially rising in the first three measures as the fear increases, but returning to the starting point where there is realisation of comfort. There is a deep descending line, with the outcry in measure 5. This leads to the measured, repeated tonic note expressing the existential question in measure 6 ("Was soll all der Schmerz und Lust?"). The rise and fall of the last four measures conclude the song in a peaceful way with two balanced phrases of two measures each (the longest in the song).

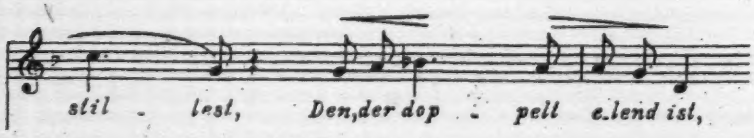
The combination of melodic shape, rhythmic movement, harmonic progression and careful pacing makes this a very good example of Schubert's approach to song composition and demonstrates the attention he gave to the emotional and expressive qualities of the poems he set. In this context we can now look at Medtner's setting of the same poem and compare his approach to the text and general musical expression.

In 1907 Medtner composed another set of songs on Goethe texts, this time opening the set of twelve songs with his setting of *Wanderers Nachtlied I*. Medtner's setting of *Wanderers Nachtlied I* is highly expressive and the piano part can easily stand alone without the voice and the poetry. This creates the feeling that Medtner used the poetry to express his musical ideas, rather than the music to serve as expression of the poetry. This could be based on a conscious decision Medtner made. When he set this poem it was already widely known, and as a result Medtner could take more liberty in his setting to express his personal reading and experience of the poem. In this way there was an intensification of meaning. The greater freedom evident in his approach to the poetry can also be linked with the different purposes of the individual settings (*Hausmusik* versus professional performance).

Medtner starts his setting of *Wanderers Nachtlied I* with a short introduction. This one bar of music is perplexing to the listener, since the first notes heard are C, F and G in a cluster, thus avoiding a clear harmonic reference. A cadence to a D major chord follows, still not giving a sense of the F major tonality that is to follow. The dotted rhythm becomes one of Medtner's typical unifying elements and appears throughout the course of the song. The repeated notes of the dotted figure vaguely remind one of the hymn-like opening to Schubert's setting. This rhythmic motif is combined with the melodic line that grows out of the opening material, creating a contrapuntal texture.

Example 5. Medtner, *Wanderers Nachtlied I*, measures 2–3

As the voice enters, it presents a rhythmically changed version of the introductory material. Medtner does not separate the first two poetic lines by setting each to one measure of music as Schubert did, but rather moves directly into the second line, creating one continuous phrase. In spite of this, Medtner's vocal line is more declamatory than Schubert's, and this is increased from here on as Medtner separates the lines of the text with rests in the vocal line.

Medtner immediately uses the first melodic line contrapuntally in the piano part, against new material in the voice, creating a layered effect. The only other thematic material occurs in measure 3, as setting to the third line of the text.

Example 6. Medtner, *Wanderers Nachtlied I*, measures 3–4

All the material throughout the rest of the song is somehow related to, or a variation of, these two themes. This is a wonderful example of Medtner's use of limited material in building an entire work.

Where Schubert sets the text "doppelt elend ist" to consonant harmonies, Medtner uses diminished and minor harmonies, increasing the intensity of these words. This

combined with the textural layering creates a sense of unrest, further emphasised by the general descending character of the first three vocal phrases.

In the first four lines of Goethe's poem, Medtner makes much more use of word painting than Schubert does. He draws attention to the word "doppelt" with syncopation, sets "Erquickung" to an ascending eighth note triplet, creating lightness, and stretches "füllest" into the longest word so far in the song, musically painting the complete fulfillment. By using one basic theme for all four lines, for both the pain and the comfort, he adds ambiguity to the text: the undercurrent of pain and sorrow remains in spite of the comfort. Unlike Schubert's setting where each melodic line has a specific shape expressing a particular idea, Medtner's vocal lines, though making use of word painting, display less of a developmental structure throughout the course of the song (unlike his setting of *Wanderers Nachtlied II*).

Medtner starts a new section for the second half of the poem. The piano part is mostly built on the rhythmic motif, while the voice presents more disjunct material than earlier in the song. By using increased chromaticism and big leaps in the vocal line, Medtner creates an unsettled atmosphere, thus following the content of these poetic lines. On the word "müde" Medtner makes use of a descending minor sixth in the vocal line, depicting the feeling of stumbling from exhaustion. An ascending major sixth is used at the beginning of the next poetic line, which ends with an ascending fifth. These leaps in measures 7 to 9, jumping around without a feeling of stability, communicate a sense of uncertainty and even fear. Harmonically Medtner moves from one key to the next (C major, A minor, A major, D major, F major, E-flat major), without settling on one tonal

centre. This further increases the feeling of being lost in the world, looking for some stability that cannot be found.

Similar to Schubert, Medtner creates the dramatic climax in lines 5 and 6 of the poem. The vocal line reaches the highest notes in the song (D-flat/C-sharp and D in measures 7 to 9), combined with a higher dynamic level and increased tempo. Both composers create forward movement towards the word "Lust," both setting the word to a long note value. By moving forward over "ich bin des Treibens müde!" both composers interpret the struggle as something that is an inevitable part of life. Medtner's setting of line 6, however, is very different from that of Schubert. Where Schubert sets the question on the tonic with the minimum change of pitch, Medtner sets this line to the most jagged melodic material in the song. This creates two very different interpretations: Schubert creates a sense of resignation in his question, while Medtner's setting expresses a strong emotional experience and resistance against accepting the struggle.

This exclamation is followed by a pause in the vocal line, with a short piano interlude (in measures 9 to 10), which presents a combination of the two themes and the rhythmic motif from the first four measures of the song. This break in the text emphasises the weariness of the speaker, and strengthens the impact of the question, once again creating a very different effect than that of Schubert. By separating the last two poetic lines from the preceding, the impression is created that the speaker concludes that there is hope for peace and resolution. Medtner expresses that clearly in his setting of these lines.

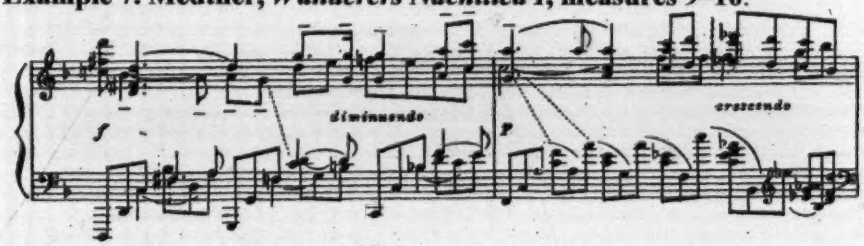
Medtner interprets these last two lines as the focus of the poem and sets the shortest line in the poem (the seventh line, "Süßer Friede") in long note values, thus giving it more importance in the overall context. An intense *crescendo* builds into the last

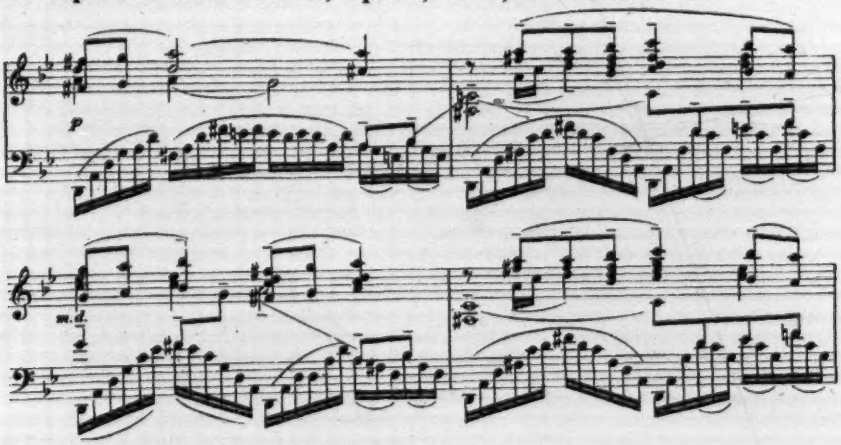
line of the poem, which Medtner repeats after a two-measure piano interlude. The composer uses different material, harmonies and dynamic levels for the second occurrence of the last line. The first time the request for peace is made in a passionate outcry, with some signs of desperation, but that is followed by a *pianissimo* setting of the last line, showing the speaker's arrival at a feeling of complete faith in redemption. In comparison, Schubert sets the music to the same material, changing only the dynamic indications for the repeat. This shows an earlier arrival at trust, signifying a less intense struggle. Medtner on the other hand deliberately expresses the struggle on earth in a dramatic, extensive way, only accomplishing peace at a later stage. This is a return to the sentiment that was expressed in Lermontov's poem, *The Angel*—Medtner's lifelong credo.

Medtner sets this last line in a low vocal register and makes use of a clear authentic cadence to indicate the finality of death. The long piano postlude following the end of the text is suggestive of a sense of continuity beyond death. Through the use of diminished chords, dominant sevenths, chromaticism, and a general avoidance of a clear tonal centre and final cadence, Medtner creates harmonic ambiguity in the last four measures. This lack of finality, combined with an intense sense of calm, expresses his belief that death merely ends earthly life and that there is something after that. In interpreting the last two lines, Schubert avoids any sense of anxiety. He uses a stronger, more final ending to his song, but does use a plagal cadence, with its reference to church music and thus spirituality.

There are many aspects of Medtner's setting of *Wanderers Nachtlied I* that separate it from the German character of Schubert's lieder, towards a more twentieth-

century Russian form of expression. There is a striking similarity between the piano writing of Medtner and Rachmaninoff, his contemporary and friend. The piano part of *Wanderers Nachtlied I* is reminiscent of Rachmaninoff's writing in some of his preludes of Op. 23 and 32. The triplet figuration in the left hand resembles that of Rachmaninoff's Op. 23, No. 4, while the contrapuntal use of thematic material in the inner voices reminds one of the middle section of Rachmaninoff's Op. 23, No. 5.

Example 7. Medtner, *Wanderers Nachtlied I*, measures 9–10:

Example 8. Rachmaninoff, Op. 23, No. 5, measures 41–44



Both composers furthermore have a tendency to place important thematic statements in the middle register of the piano, exploiting the natural warmth and richness of the tone in this area. This is an important characteristic of Russian music, originating in the focus on the bass line in Orthodox church music (Dolskaya-Ackerly 2001, 15).

This can be demonstrated by Medtner's use of a low register for the last vocal line of the song and through the piano postlude. Throughout Rachmaninoff's Op. 32, No. 12, the thematic statements are also primarily in the middle to low register, juxtaposing the lightness of the accompaniment figures with the intensity of the melodic material.

Medtner's setting demonstrates very effectively how he makes use of intricate and complex contrapuntal material, using several motifs together, not only in the piano part, but also in combination with the vocal line. There is a relatively limited use of material, with continuity created in the accompaniment figuration (in the left hand), but also with overlapping thematic lines.

Almost a hundred years passed between these two settings and there are some obvious differences in musical language—especially the use of harmony and the intensity of expression. However, it is surprising how many similarities there are. Both composers make use of major keys, and both songs are through-composed. There is forward motion in both songs in the fifth and sixth lines of the text; both songs allude to the church and a spiritual connotation. Both composers repeat the last part of the poem (Schubert repeats one more line than Medtner), focussing on peace.

Medtner's *Wanderers Nachtlied I* refers back to the nineteenth-century German lied in every aspect of its conception, yet it is clearly the work of a composer who is not of that time. That becomes evident in his more intense expression, the very personal reading of the poem, and his use of the text as an additional layer, rather than the main focus. As already discussed, the fact that Goethe wrote this poem in a previous century and that it was very well-known, contributed to the greater sense of freedom that Medtner took in his interpretation of the work. That freedom is further increased by the different

social and cultural surroundings in which he lived and worked. The function of music had changed dramatically over the hundred years that separated Schubert and Medtner, dictating Medtner's conception of the lied as a respected and known art form, rather than a genre in the process of being formed according to the ideas and needs of early nineteenth-century society. On this basis, one has to view Medtner's lieder as a longing for the past aesthetics of beauty, yet also as a product of his keen awareness of the world in which he was living.

Nähe des Geliebten	***Nearness of the Beloved***
Ich denke dein, wenn mir der Sonne Schimmer	I think of you when the sunlight shimmers,
Vom Meere strahlt;	beaming from the sea;
Ich denke dein, wenn sich des Mondes Flimmer	I think of you when the moon's gleam
In Quellen malt.	paints the streams.
Ich sehe dich, wenn auf dem fernen Wege	I see you when, on distant roads,
Der Staub sich hebt;	the dust rises up;
In tiefer Nacht, wenn auf dem schmalen Stege	in the deep night, when on the narrow bridge
Der Wandrer bebt.	A traveler quivers.
Ich höre dich, wenn dort mit dumpfem Rauschen	I hear you when there, with a muffled roar,
Die Welle steigt.	The waves rise.
Im stillen Hain da geh ich oft zu lauschen,	In the still grove I go often to listen,
Wenn alles schweigt.	When everything is silent.
Ich bin bei dir, du seist auch noch so ferne.	I am with you, even if you are so far away.
Du bist mir nah!	You are near me!
Die Sonne sinkt, bald leuchten mir die Sterne.	The sun sinks, and soon the stars will shine for me
O wärst du da!	O, if only you were here![7]

Goethe's poem *Nähe des Geliebten* is loosely based on verses written by Friederike Brun. Goethe heard a Zelter setting of these verses in 1796 and decided to write words to fit the tune; in other words, following the metric pattern of the music. The poem was published in Schiller's *Musenalmanach* in the same year (Byrne 2003, 173).

The poem consists of four verses of four lines each. In each verse the first and third lines are long phrases, consisting of two ideas: I think about you, when . . .; the

[7] Translation from German to English by Emily Ezust, http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/

second and fourth lines are short extensions of those thoughts expressed in the preceding lines. The rhyme scheme contributes to the consistency of the sentence structure throughout the poem, following an ABAB pattern. This predictable design emphasises the constancy of the love; it is always present and never changing.

In this poem, Goethe makes use of images from nature to describe his love. These concrete images are presented and contrasted to emphasise the significance and scope of this love. At the same time it is worth noting that the poem is exclusively from the perspective of the speaker and focussed on the "self."

Visual images form the core of the first verse and immediately the polarity is striking. The sun and moon are described as being reflected in the sea and streams on earth. So, the visual description of high and low, and day and night, gives an immediate sense that there is no limit to time and space for this love.

Schubert's masterful setting of *Nähe des Geliebten* dates from 1815. It is a strophic setting in G-flat major written in 12/8 meter. The performance instruction he includes is *Langsam, feierlich mit Anmuth.*

The song is a mere ten measures long, of which two measures form the prelude and two the postlude. The greater presence of piano in terms of prelude and postlude indicates a move toward its growing importance in the genre. This is in accordance with Schubert's development as a song composer, exploring a more involved role for the piano in the overall relationship between voice and accompaniment in the lied.

Schubert set the four lines of poetry to a total of six measures of music, moving through a wide range of dynamics, from triple *piano* to *forte*. The vocal range spans just more than an octave, while the piano part is written mostly in the lower middle range.

The piano prelude introduces the repeated chord movement that continues throughout the song. Starting on the dominant of the relative minor, the line rises slowly and chromatically until the voice enters in measure 3. Harmonically the complexity increases with the dynamic level, including a diminished and a German sixth chord, leading into the *forte* vocal entry. The chromatic character of the prelude increases the intensity of the music, and creates excitement and anticipation for the voice entry on the tonic.

The voice enters on a high G-flat and moves in a combination of steps and jumps, often outlining the chord in the piano part. The difficulty of the vocal line (especially the entrance on the highest note of the song!) makes this song less suitable for amateur performance and is an example of how Schubert moved away from the simple *Volkslied*, towards a more artistic genre.

Schubert separates the first two lines of the text with two eighth-note rests in the vocal line, while the piano continues with repeated chords. He treats the third and fourth lines differently. Here he uses the eighth-note separation in the middle of the third poetic line, changing the structure of the original poem. By doing this, Schubert clearly takes artistic license to fit the text to his idea of it, even though a listener would hardly notice the change.

At the same time, Schubert treats the two halves of the poem very independently, finishing both with final cadences. This separation is further emphasised in the difference in piano writing; the first half is based on repeated chords, with a clear bass line only appearing in measure 4, while the second half of the verse includes many rests combined with a more melodic bass line. Frisch (1986, 194) describes the second half of the song as

functioning as "a kind of coda" to the first half, confirming the key. He further interprets the tranquility of the second phrase and the horn call motif in measure 6 as signs of the poet's acceptance of the distance between him and his beloved (192). This however is offset by Schubert's setting of the last two lines in a higher range, reaching the top G-flat four times. Though this creates greater intensity on some levels, drawing the focus to the second half of each verse, the first two lines are set more syllabically than the last, slightly increasing the lyricism and flowing character of the last two lines. The more lyrical approach in the last half of the poem is not very suitable for the last verse, where the poet exclaims the wish that his beloved were with him. It does, however, reflect the text in the first three verses more accurately.

The typical problem of strophic songs—to effectively express the entire course of the text—is thus addressed, albeit limiting Schubert in following the meaning of each verse. In this strophic setting, according to the aesthetics of the period, the overall mood of the poem is captured, giving the opportunity to the performers to create finer nuance and expression.

Throughout the song passing tones play an important role. They are used eleven times in the piano part and four in the vocal line. Rhythmically the song is simple, with different combinations of eighth-note movement. This is broken only once in measure 7 in the vocal line, where the rhythm speeds up, causing excitement as the end of each verse approaches.

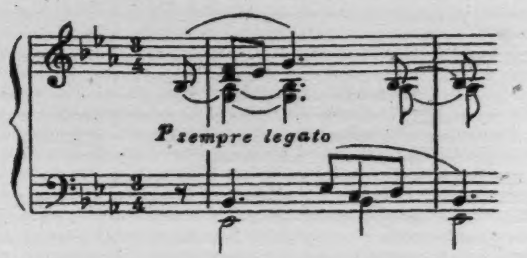
Although Schubert's song is a masterful setting of Goethe's poem, creating an intimate atmosphere of excitement and longing, it is subject to certain limitations due to the use of strophic form. The general aesthetic values of the early nineteenth-century lied

are focussed on the music expressing one overall mood. This lack of specific expression is particularly problematic in the last line of the poem, where the exclamation "O wärst du da!" follows the same descending, peaceful line as all the other strophes. Hans Gal (Frisch 1986, 195) describes the fourth verse as a disappointment, mainly due to the necessity for a change of character.

Medtner's setting of *Nähe des Geliebten* is also from his Op. 15 set. The song is in E-flat major and through-composed, totalling forty-six measures. This is only slightly longer than the total of the four verses of Schubert's setting. This increased length is mostly due to Medtner's greater use of piano interludes. Medtner chooses triple meter and indicates that it is to be performed *Largamente, con passione*. Medtner's tempo marking already indicates a great difference from Schubert's setting, where there is a more introspective character.

Medtner uses a much wider vocal and dynamic range than that of Schubert's setting, and this too increases the setting's ability to express varying levels of excitement. Typical to his style, Medtner makes use of many performance instructions, most of them tempo markings. This is very characteristic of the twentieth century (it is also characteristic of Rachmaninoff's writing), where composers attempted to regulate the performance of their work to the last detail.

The song starts with a one-measure piano introduction, where the main motif is introduced first in the top voice, then in retrograde inversion in the tenor.

Example 9. Medtner, *Nähe des Geliebten*, measures 1–2

As the voice enters, it starts with this motif and extends the phrase further. This motif carries much of the longing and passion of the song through the winding movement and the descending second, which creates the character of a sigh. The motif outlines an interval of a sixth as well as the tonic-mediant, emphasising the major key. It also includes the dominant-tonic movement, which creates a feeling of security and strength of conviction.

The second motif is introduced in the piano part and takes the form of a descending line, first heard in chords in measure 3 and repeated three more times in the first verse. This descending line has a very soothing quality, immediately giving the music a peaceful atmosphere.

Example 10. Medtner, *Nähe des Geliebten*, measure 3

The first motif is heard in the voice on the first words of each of the first and third poetic lines—the second time an octave higher and with changed intervals. This creates

an intensification of the second half of the verse, further increased by the use of both motifs in the piano. In the first verse alone the piano presents this theme four times in the original way, and three times in retrogrades. These motifs have expressive associations and form the building blocks of the song. This again demonstrates Medtner's ability to create unity in a through-composed song, by his use of limited material.

The vocal line of the first verse stretches over a wide range and mostly stepwise movement occurs. A variety of rhythms is used in the voice part, with the longest notes on "dein," "strahlt," "dein," and "malt." This draws the attention to these words, alluding to the beloved. Medtner sets the first two poetic lines as a continuous musical idea, but follows Goethe's organisation of the last lines.

In measure 7, the piano texture changes to triplet eighths in the bass line, partly connecting the first and second verses, but also depicting the movement of the stream. By doing this, Medtner makes use of tone painting, and increases the excitement and forward motion towards the second verse.

In the eight bars of the second verse, the first motif occurs four times in the piano and twice in inversion in the voice (measures 11 and 15). Medtner makes extensive use of the second motif, in its original form as well as inversion. The voice moves mostly in steps in this verse and spans a narrower range, while the piano makes use of a wider range than in the first verse. The presentation of the text is much more fragmented in the second verse, dividing the four lines into six short parts. This fragmented character depicts the tiredness of the traveller.

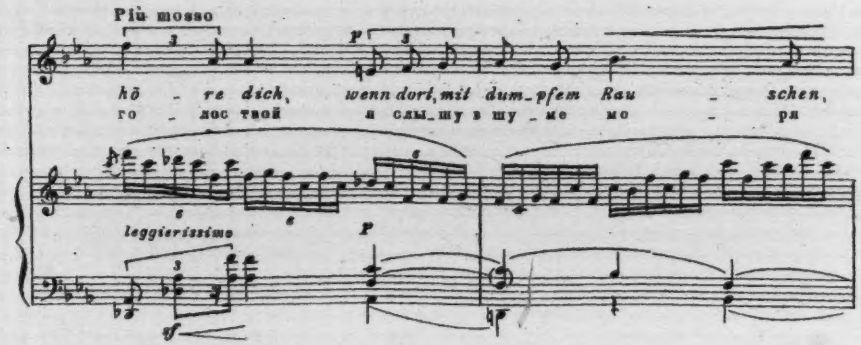
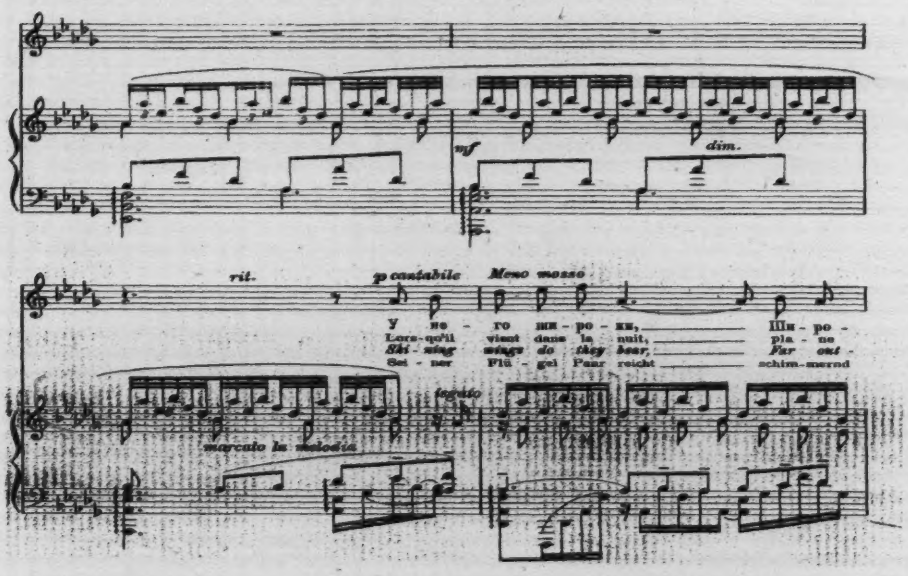
Medtner makes use of different techniques to interpret the text musically. The longest note values are used on the words "in tiefer Nacht" emphasising the depth of

night by extending the sound. In measure 13 the words "schmalen Stege" is set in a narrow range, with a chromatically descending vocal line. "Der Wanderer bebt" is set to the ascending line, but at this point the right hand chords are marked *staccato*. The change in articulation, combined with the ascending line and *poco a poco agitato* marking (starting in measure 10) prepare for the textural change in the third verse.

The third verse starts in D flat major but includes a variety of chromatically altered chords that gradually allow it to return to E flat major. It is marked *più mosso* and *leggierissimo*, and unfolds over the course of fifteen measures. This makes it the longest of the four verses. Without changing the tempo, Medtner picks up the pace by introducing sixteenth-note sextuplets.

The verse starts *forte*, but quickly goes down in dynamic level. The first intervals of this verse are a wide leap up, to the highest note in the verse, and back down, emphasising the words "ich höre dich" like a joyful exclamation. In contrast to that, the ending is in a narrow range and played at a soft dynamic level.

In the accompaniment the left hand material is grouped in units of two bars, starting with ascending triplet chords, followed by a stepwise descending line. The right hand plays descending and ascending figuration in arpeggiated form. This figuration is very pianistic and is reminiscent of Rachmaninoff's writing in many of his best solo piano works, also appearing in his song *Dreams* (Op. 38, No. 5, 1916) for example.

Example 11. Medtner, *Nähe des Geliebten*, measures 16–17

Example 12. Rachmaninoff, *Dreams*, measures 20–23

dim.
rit.
p cantabile
Meno mosso
У не - го ни - по - ки, Шш - по -
Lors-qu'il vient dans la nuit, pia - ne
Shi - sing sings do they bear, Far out -
Sei - ner Flü - gel Paar reicht schim-mernd
legato
marcato la melodia

Though the vocal line in Medtner's *Nähe des Geliebten* varies in dynamic level, the piano part's dynamic markings continue on the quiet end of the spectrum. The first motif appears only twice in the third verse, both times in the vocal line and with altered intervals.

Medtner decides to repeat the last line, "Wenn alles schweigt." He sets these words to slow rhythms in a narrow range and in a low vocal register. The piano figuration

starts to become more limited in range and by the second time the line is heard, it is only a rustling of sound, played *pianissimo*.

Medtner treats this verse differently than the other three, both in his limited use of the main motifs, but also in the lightness and fleeting rhythmical movement. The auditory sense is the focus of the text, and Medtner emphasises the importance of sound and silence in this central section of the song. The introspective quality of the text results in a very low dynamic range (a mere rustling) and finally silence in measure 31. This creates intense anticipation for the return of sound after the flourish of movement stopped so suddenly for the first time in the song. Two sustained chords lead back to the fourth verse, which is treated very similarly to the first.

The vocal line of the final verse starts like the first verse, but instead of expanding the material, Medtner repeats the motif for both the second and third phrases, using different endings. The accompaniment also starts the same as in the first verse, but the motif is constantly used and the texture is thicker with more contrapuntal complexity. In total, the motif is heard ten times between measures 33 and 37. The first two lines of this verse are divided into three fragments, and Medtner repeats the second line, "du bist mir nah!". In the repeat the word "bist" is set to silence in the piano part; as a result it stands out against the activity that surrounds it. The result of this repetition is that this line is interpreted as central to the poem. Medtner interprets the closeness of the beloved as something peaceful and wonderful, emphasised by the three broken chords in the piano.

The last two lines start with light descending intervals in the high register with the left hand presenting broken chords. There is almost no stepwise movement in the vocal line, and it follows mostly chordal outlines. Once again the two lines are broken into

three fragments and the second and third are presented in slower note values. "Bald leuchten mir die Sterne" is set to an ascending line, lifting the gaze up to the sky. The last line's exclamation is set to the first motif in the high register in the voice. Before the end of the phrase the piano part starts to thicken and in measure 42 harmonic tension and fuller texture help intensify the approach to the last note, which is set *fortissimo*. Medtner includes an *accelerando* in the piano postlude, which is built on the tonic harmony and ends in a widely-spaced chord.

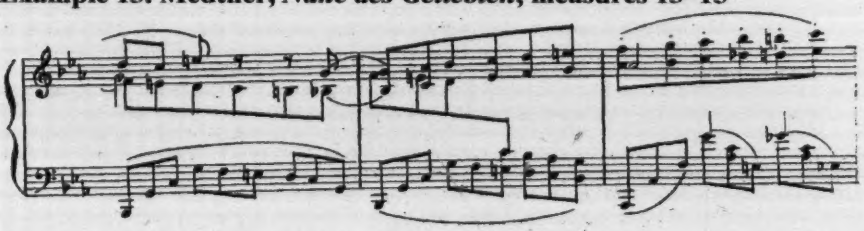
Each verse of the setting has a distinct character, and there is a rhythmic *accelerando* in the first three verses, coming to a complete standstill before the last verse. This increasing excitement reflects growing admiration and longing for the beloved. By setting the fourth verse similarly to the first, Medtner creates a sense that the beloved will return.

Medtner creates two climaxes in the song. In measures 35 and 36 there is an introspective climax on the words "du bist mir nah"; this is the tenderest point of the song, giving expression to deep feelings for the distant beloved. A clearer, more exuberant climax at the end (measures 42 to 43) describes the speaker's longing to be reunited, but not in a desperate way; the atmosphere is jubilant, implying that this is not the song of a dejected lover.

One of Medtner's most important stylistic characteristics is that of creating unity using limited thematic material. His setting of *Nähe des Geliebten* is a wonderful example of this striking use of thematic unity and contrapuntal complexity, demonstrating that cohesiveness does not have to be sacrificed when using a through-

composed form. Furthermore, some of the ways in which he creates that unity link him not only to the Germanic tradition and the lied, but also to his Russian heritage.

Medtner's characteristic repetition of short motifs, with or without variation, contributes to the Russian sound in his music, a characteristic that is also found in the works of Rachmaninoff. A particular example of this characteristic in this song is his use of the basso ostinato, which accompanies the entire second verse (measures 7 to 15) of *Nähe des Geliebten*.

Example 13. Medtner, *Nähe des Geliebten*, measures 13–15

In the first two verses of *Nähe des Geliebten*, Medtner subtly makes use of another Russian element in his writing, namely the uneven number of measures in each phrase. From the beginning of the song until the start of the third verse (in measure 16), the vocal line is grouped into phrases of three or five measures, totally avoiding the western tendency to use even numbers of measures in phrases.

Meeresstille	***Calm Sea***
[1] Tiefe Stille herrscht im Wasser,	Deep stillness reigns on the water;
[2] Ohne Regung ruht das Meer,	motionless, the sea rests,
[3] Und bekümmert sieht der Schiffer	and the sailor gazes about with alarm
[4] Glatte Fläche rings umher.	at the smooth flatness all around.
[5] Keine Luft von Keiner Seite!	No breeze from any side!
[6] Todesstille fürchterlich!	It is fearfully, deathly still!
[7] In der ungeheuren Weite	In the enormous expanse
[8] Reget keine Welle sich.	not one wave stirs.[8]

Goethe wrote *Meeresstille*, and paired it with another poem, *Glückliche Fahrt*, in 1795. *Meeresstille* was published in the *Musenalmanach* in 1796. These two poems describe an experience Goethe had on a boat off the Italian coast. During the trip, he got to know the ocean in all its dangerous beauty, including the dead quiet and the stormy sea (Byrne 2003, 144).

According to Byrne, Goethe often used the sea as a symbol for the journey through life and as a symbol of "the divinity . . . revealed in energy and in form" (145). The poem is a description of nature, but functions as a parallel for the inner emotional life of man and his existence on earth. In *Meeresstille* ambiguity is created through the description of superficial peace and quiet, which causes the effect of threat and terror. This is best demonstrated in the use of the word "Stille" which initially signifies something beautiful and positive, but in the second half of the poem turns into "Todesstille" an intense description of inner turmoil and fear. There is another possible

[8] Translation from German to English by Emily Ezust, http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/

interpretation; according to Geoffrey Tozer (2004, 8) these two poems can be interpreted as a metaphor for political stagnation and revolutionary ideas.

Schubert composed two settings of *Meeres Stille*[9] in 1815. It is remarkable that he had managed this early in his life to create such a masterful expression of quiet angst. The through-composed song is in C major, and is thirty-two measures long. The performance indication is *Sehr langsam, ängstlich.*

Two of the most immediately obvious characteristics of the song are the style of the accompaniment and the lack of movement in the vocal line. In the piano part Schubert makes use of rolled chords through the course of the entire song, creating the effect of soft splashing, or ripples on the surface of the sea. The chords are written in whole-note values, and this defines the harmonic rhythm—moving slowly with only one harmony per measure. Because of the lack of rhythmic interest in the piano part, the effect of harmonic change is more noticeable and Schubert creates impact through the use of unexpected chords. In combination with the slow moving vocal line, the overall effect is very powerful.

The song starts at a dynamic level of *pianissimo* and by keeping the dynamic level unchanged, Schubert creates a static atmosphere. The first vocal phrase is entirely built on the three notes of the C-major triad, supported by simple tonic and dominant harmonies in the piano. The rhythm presented in this first phrase forms the most typical rhythmic movement in the voice part.

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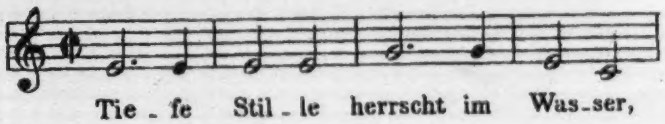
[9] Schubert changed the title of *Meeresstille* to two words: *Meeres Stille.*

Example 14. Schubert, *Meeres Stille*, measures 1–4



In the second phrase Schubert makes use of one dominant seventh chord, ending with an authentic cadence in E major. This does not create tension, yet implies an unpredictability that only becomes clear later on in the song. The first stepwise movement in the voice occurs on the cadence with the words "ruht das Meer." The more lyrical stepwise motion reflects the smoothness of the sea. The importance of "ruht" is heightened through the use of an ornament, which adds a subtle rhythmic interest. However, in creating emphasis, he actually contradicts the meaning of the word. Here Schubert uses ambiguity to draw attention to the duality of the calm sea reflected in the turmoil in the speaker.

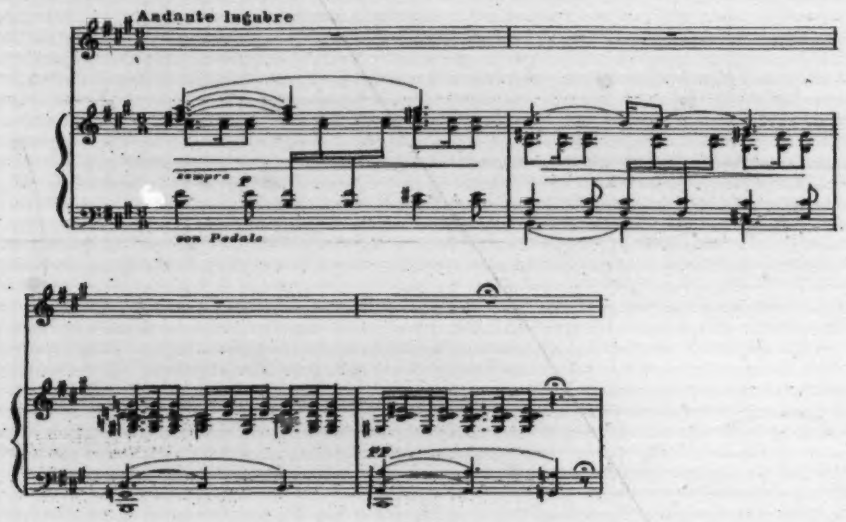
Schubert sets the next line in A minor. Where he used dominant seventh movement in the previous phrase, he now settles in A minor, starting the phrase on a diminished chord. The use of diminished chords and the minor key reflect the fear of the sailor. This is combined with the rising line in the voice, arriving at the highest note of the song, an appoggiatura on "Schiffer." This contributes to the growing sense of tension and panic and also draws attention from the expanse of nature inwards to the personal level. At this point the voice moves in a more stepwise fashion and the fastest rhythm in the song is heard on the word "bekümmert" (dotted quarter followed by an eighth note). This rhythm can be interpreted as the heartbeat of the sailor. At the end of the first verse Schubert returns to triadic movement in the vocal line, and combined with peaceful harmonies (sub-dominant chords), he returns to the opening description of the motionless

sea. Just before the end of the phrase, a diminished chord reminds the listener that the peace is in reality threatening.

At the beginning of the second verse, the voice moves in jumps, outlining a diminished seventh chord (D-sharp – F-sharp – A – C). Schubert uses the rhythm of a dotted half followed by a quarter three times, which gives heaviness to the rhythm. The second line of this verse follows a descending line, ending on the lowest note in the song on the word "fürchterlich." This phrase ends on a half cadence in E minor. After a *fermata* the voice continues with leaps, accompanied by simple harmonies in the piano. The consonant harmonies that are used in these very agonizing lines imply resignation to fate and one's inability to control destiny. The last line of the poem starts with a modulation back to C major. The voice becomes stagnant and presents a repeated "G," until it falls to the last word on "C," the tonic.

This setting of Schubert is unique in many ways. He makes use of a melodic line with uncharacteristically little stepwise motion and hardly any movement in the piano. The accompaniment, in its repetitive rolled chords, perfectly depicts the quietness and slight movement of the water. On only two occasions is the vocal line embellished, the first instance to create ambiguous movement on the word "ruht," and the second to create the sense of active movement in "sieht." The voice often outlines the harmonies and the abundance of repeated notes allows for the words to unfold without obvious interruption. This contributes to the smooth character of the song. In spite of the indication that the song is to be sung *ängstlich*, there is a great deal of resignation in the depiction of helplessness.

Medtner's setting of *Meeresstille* is also through-composed, and it is one measure shorter than that of Schubert's. The performance indication is *Andante lugubre*, the key is F-sharp minor and Medtner uses the unusual meter of 8/8. Though Medtner's 8/8 has the same combined note value as Schubert's 2/2, it has a totally different effect. The eight pulses are divided into uneven groupings of 3+2+3 or 3+3+2, creating an unstable effect. This effectively imitates the sound of splashing against the ship and its slight swaying, but also creates a sense of instability due to uncertainty.

Example 15. Medtner, *Meeresstille*, measures 1–4

Fifteen of the thirty-one measures of the song are presented by piano alone, with four bars each in the prelude and interlude and seven bars in the postlude. Apart from the three-note motif heard in measure 2, the piano does not take part in the presentation of melodic themes and creation of contrapuntal lines, but is responsible for introducing the rhythmic motif. This is important, since both Schubert and Medtner use the piano to create atmosphere and imitate the soft rippling sound of the sea.

In the introduction the tonal centre is veiled, so that the harmonic arrival occurs only in measure 5 with the cadence to the tonic. An important motif is the descending two- or three-note line, heard within the first two measures. In measure 2, this line adds to the rhythmic irregularity. The introduction starts at a low dynamic level and gets still softer, ending on a rest with a *fermata*. This point of absolute quiet leads to the entry of the voice, on the first words of the poem, "Tiefe Stille."

The voice moves in even quarter- and eighth-note rhythms. With the exception of the word "fürchterlich" in measure 20 and also measure 24, the voice never uses the dotted eighth rhythm. By giving that rhythm exclusively to the piano, Medtner juxtaposes the sea—represented by the piano—against man, represented by the singer. As in Schubert's setting, the voice has little stepwise movement in the first line. When it does occur in the second line of the poem, the stepwise movement reflects the smoothness of the sea. In the first four measures of the vocal line Medtner avoids any sense of cadential pull by using the dominant only twice (neither moving to the tonic) and avoiding the leading tone altogether. This combined with the centering around F-sharp creates a lack of direction. By using a G-sharp in the voice against tonic harmony in the piano, an intensification of sound is created on the word "Stille." This communicates the underlying foreboding and angst hidden in the quietness. The word "Meer" is set to a whole note, depicting the wide expanse of the sea.

The next phrase is marked *poco crescendo ed agitato* and the harmonies become more complex and chromatic. In the voice the two lines of the first phrase are now switched around, first presenting the stepwise line, and then the line built on leaps. The vocal line moves toward a high "E" on the word "Schiffer" drawing attention to the

plight of the sailor. It is interesting to note that Schubert and Medtner both set the word "Schiffer" as a point of arrival on a high note. This is the first time the human element is present and by drawing the attention to the person in the vocal line, while continuing the movement of the sea in the piano, Medtner places man against nature. On the word "bekümmert" Medtner creates tension by making use of a chromatically-descending line.

An interlude separates the two verses. It is based on the same material as the prelude, marked *poco più mobile*. As in the prelude, the interlude is based on the sub-dominant, but this time it cadences into a dominant pedal on C-sharp, which is part of the submediant chord. By doing this, Medtner subtly increases the dramatic tension at the start of the second verse.

In the second verse Medtner changes the voice entry to the downbeat (measure 17). Contrary to the pattern Medtner created up to this point in the song, this is the first time the voice enters on the downbeat following a rest. This is unexpected and draws the attention to the first word of the phrase, "keine" which creates a sense of urgency and growing panic. The line begins the same way as measure 7, but the phrase ends with a leap of a sixth up and back down, followed by silence. The second line of this verse is divided into two parts, separated by rests in the vocal line. Each time the first note is accented, followed by a descending leap, growing from a minor sixth to a minor seventh. The lowest note of the song falls on "stille" which becomes the equivalent of death. The fragmented setting of the line increases the growing panic and fear, resembling outcries. In the second verse the rhythmic grouping presented in the piano includes the organisation of 3+3+2 as well as 3+2+3, further emphasising the unpredictability of nature.

The last two lines of the poem are in many ways similar to measures 9 and 10 and comprise the only clearly rising line in the song. The highest note in the song is on "ungeheuren" while "Weite" is stretched out over an entire measure, in the high vocal register. The two longest note values in the song fall on the fear-inducing words "Meer" and "Weite." With these techniques Medtner contrasts human frailty and lack of power to the magnificence of nature. The last line in the voice part starts the same as the first, but ends in the low register and does not rise again. "Welle" is sustained over the bar line and the end of the word is heard in the voice alone. The word "sich" is sung with no piano accompaniment. This is the first time that the piano is not supporting the voice and it increases the solitude of being lost at sea.

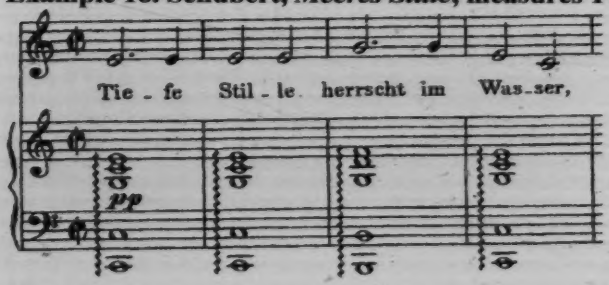
The piano postlude presents the same material as in the prelude. Medtner includes three widely spaced rolled chords, giving a quick glimmer of hope that there might be a change in movement, but the repetitive rhythms return, with no hope that circumstances will change. The postlude is based on a deceptively simple tonic, sub-dominant and dominant bass line, juxtaposing simplicity and complexity, hope and despair.

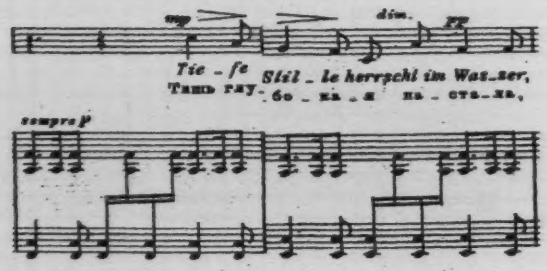
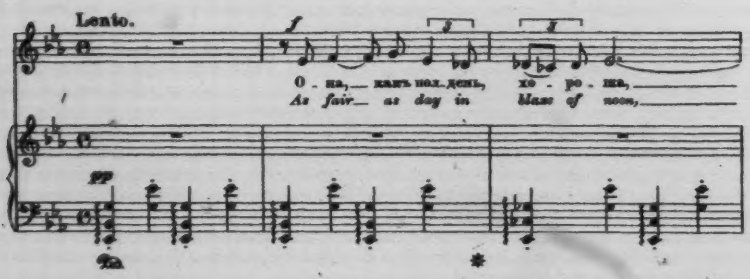
Medtner uses a long prelude and postlude, thus placing the text at the heart of the song. By the time the voice enters, the listener already has a sense of the character and atmosphere which allows for the attention to go directly to the text. At the same time, the prelude and postlude represent the ever-present nature versus the temporary existence of man.

Though the general rhythmic movement in this song is very predictable with no change on the horizon, it remains the focus of the song. Medtner was widely recognised for his innovative and complex use of rhythm. In *Meeresstille* he simplifies this rhythmic

complexity into a repetitive rhythmic pattern of irregular nature, focussing on the emotional experience of the ocean and its power. In this instance, his use of rhythm is not aimed at creating layers of complexity, but rather as a descriptive device to evoke the vastness of the ocean and its movement. Against this piano part the voice presents its own exclusive material, carrying the melodic line. This is unusual for Medtner who characteristically integrates his thematic material into a very tightly woven unit. Medtner's setting of *Meeresstille* resembles Rachmaninoff's Op. 14 No. 9 ("As fair as day in blaze of noon") in the use of a repetitive, chordal piano part, supporting the melodic line in the voice. At the same time the approach is similar to that of Schubert, who also chose to limit the piano to playing chords, while presenting the melodic material exclusively in the vocal part. Medtner, like Schubert, made use of a slow harmonic progression, limiting most of the song to one harmony per measure.

Example 16. Schubert, *Meeres Stille*, measures 1–4



Example 17. Medtner, *Meeresstille*, measures 5–6

Example 18. Rachmaninoff, Op. 14, No. 9, measures 1–3

Due to more stepwise movement, Medtner's setting tends to be more melodious than Schubert's, though both composers at times use the chord outline to form the vocal line. Though the piano is more in the foreground in Medtner's setting, it still functions mostly as support for the voice and as a means of creating atmosphere. This treatment of the piano is not characteristic for Medtner and follows a more traditional approach. Both composers chose to set the word "Schiffer" to the highest note, while choosing "todesstille fürchterlich" for the lowest notes.

Some important differences also occur. Schubert set the song in C major, with modulations to minor keys, while Medtner chose F-sharp minor for the song. Schubert never uses the piano without the voice while in Medtner's setting the piano is heard solo for about half the song. For Medtner the sea is ever-present, while humans come and go. This also implies that Schubert moves through the text much more slowly than Medtner,

who needs only sixteen bars to completely set the text. There is little unity in Schubert's vocal line; unity is rather created by the use of rolled whole-note chords in the piano, functioning as motivic ideas in themselves. Harmonic unity is achieved through the use of a clear C major opening and ending. Medtner on the other hand again makes use of very limited material, repeating phrases and motifs in imaginative ways.

The very personal character of Medtner's setting fits very well with his approach to music and reflects the changed approach to music and song specifically. Schubert set Goethe's text to some extent with the calm of an observer, who is not directly touched by the events. Medtner approached Goethe in a much more subjective way than Schubert, which is reflected in his greater focus on the inner state of the speaker. The emphasis is on the inner struggle, man against nature, and the idea of being alone against the world. This is in line with Medtner's ideas about life and his struggle to preserve the aesthetics of music against the onslaught of the early twentieth-century musical developments.

CONCLUSION

Nikolai Medtner made a significant contribution to the lieder genre. As a Russian composer of the early twentieth century, he was greatly indebted to the "father" of the German lied, Franz Schubert, all the while adhering to the values and requirements of the changed aesthetic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although Medtner most commonly made use of the through-composed song form, at the centre of his compositions was his ability to create unity by unifying motifs and thematic material. By using this material in a contrapuntal manner, Medtner created layered structures of great intricacy and beauty.

Medtner's use of limited material resembles to some extent Schubert's repetition of accompaniment figures, yet in Medtner's lieder the piano parts are much more involved and in the foreground. This is a reflection of Medtner as virtuoso pianist, and as a contemporary of Rachmaninoff. There is an emphasis on preludes, postludes and interludes of great complexity and in his songs the piano functions at least on an equal level as the voice. The piano parts in the majority of the songs show a clear resemblance to the piano works and songs of Rachmaninoff in terms of figuration, the use of inner voices to present thematic material, dark colours in the middle register, and contrapuntal activity. More generally, many of these same characteristics give Medtner's lieder their Russian character, mainly in terms of the dark colour, polyphonic lines, ostinato and irregular phrase structures.

In his songs, Medtner follows the character and development of the poems. By making use of a variety of musical techniques, Medtner creates points of tension and release according to the text. Climactic points are created in many different ways,

depending on the character of the text. When the poem is very introspective, the music often reaches a climax through the thinning of textures, a very low dynamic level, and dramatic use of silence, dissonance and adjunct intervals. Exuberant climaxes are created through increased rhythmic tempo, thicker textures, extreme ranges and a high dynamic level.

Medtner's songs show a great understanding of the voice, which is probably due to his exposure to his mother's singing early in his life. Though the vocal lines are highly demanding, usually with a wide range and difficult leaps, it is never for mere technical display, but works towards creating an effective whole. At the same time, the piano parts are also technically difficult, often on the same level as his solo piano pieces. Very often in the songs, the piano carries most of the thematic material, often exclusive to the piano and totally independent from the voice. At other times the voice and piano are completely integrated, with contrapuntal lines weaving from the one to the other. This tight structural writing is characteristic of his solo piano works as well.

In his book, *The Muse and the Fashion*, Medtner strongly attacks the modern trends in music, especially in the field of harmony (1935, 80). It is interesting to note in his songs that he makes use of a rather advanced harmonic language. Though he never strays from tonality, Medtner uses complex chromaticism, chords with added ninths, elevenths and thirteenths, as well as unresolved dissonance and enharmonic alterations. The harmonies are never simple, yet the music sounds like it belongs in the nineteenth century.

Rhythm is very important in Medtner's piano music and plays an important role in his songs as well. In his Op. 1, No. 1, *The Angel*, Medtner uses a highly complex

rhythmic background to create an esoteric atmosphere with beautiful lyrical lines. This is typical of his writing and appears to some extent in many of his later songs as well. Another technique he uses is obscuring the bar line, creating a feeling of uncertainty. Triplets, sextuplets, two against three, syncopation and a great variety of tempo-related performance instructions further add to the rhythmic complexity of the songs.

Medtner's lieder display a wide array of characteristics, showing a variety of factors that influenced the composer. As a Russian pianist his music reflects the colour and virtuosity of the time he lived, yet as a song composer, his approach to the lieder genre is firmly rooted both in nineteenth-century aesthetic values and his immersion in the lied as a musical-poetic tradition. Medtner combined the romantic ideal of virtuosity and personal expression with his search for beauty.

Medtner had a strong yearning for a return to the aesthetics of the nineteenth century. In his lieder he attempted to recreate the principles of that era, not only in his musical language, but also through his choice of genres. The lied has a strong association with the nineteenth century and in his composition of lieder Medtner followed in the tradition of Schubert, Schumann and Wolf. His choice of poetry by Goethe as the main source for his German lieder further reflects his search for beauty and spirituality, and represents his dream of the past. Medtner's lieder, though reflecting his twentieth-century surroundings and his nationality remain a true expression of the nineteenth-century German lied tradition. These songs are gems in the genre, achieving a sensitive balance between voice and piano and between word and music.

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